DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 308 677 EC 220 550

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TITLE Transitioning That Works: A Community College Approach.
PUB DATE Apr 89
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 3-7, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; College Programs; *Community Colleges; Demonstration Programs; *Developmental Disabilities; Interpersonal Competence; *Job Placement; *Job Training; *Moderate Mental Retardation; Program Development; *Transitional Programs; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Iowa; *Supported Work Programs

ABSTRACT

The Individualized Resource Program/Community-Based Vocational Training Program of the Iowa Valley Community College District provides assessment, vocational and functional academics training, and job placement services for adults with developmental disabilities and moderate mental retardation. Participants complete a non-credit community college program that lasts up to 2 years, with the goal of subsequently acquiring competitive job placement in the private sector. The program combines classroom education with training at both campus training stations and at job sites in competitive employment environments. The most common problem at the training sites involves the socialization skills of the students. Therefore, much attention is given to problem-solving, personal management, student reaction to constructive criticism, and attention to work rules. The job coaching is designed to "fade" as progress is made with each student. Follow-up services are usually limited to 2 years following placement in competitive employment. Over the past 3-year period, placement of students completing the program has been 70 percent. (JDD)

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# "Transitioning That Works: A Community College Approach"

Iowa Valley Community College District
Marshalltown Community College
Ellsworth Community College

by William B. Martin

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## Introduction

The Individualized Resource Program/Community-Based Vocational Training (IRP/CBVT) Program consists of two separate programs on two campus locations of the Iowa Valley Community College District. The IRP/CBVT has been in operation for six years, has received state and national recognition, and is only one of 17 similar programs nationwide. In March 1988, the program received the Secretary of Education's Award for Outstanding Vocational Education Programs. Prior to that time, the CBVT was selected as outstanding by the Iowa Department of Education. This program provides assessment, vocational and functional academics training and job placement services. It is designed to be a transitional program, with time-limited follow-up services.

The Iowa Valley Community College District is a rural community college district serving a total population 101,000 in four central Iowa counties. Although much of the economy is agriculturally-based, considerable manufacturing and service occupations exist.

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## Program Description

The IPP/CBVT consists of a non-credit community college program that lasts up to two years. The population served is the adult(age 18 and over) developmentally disabled who are moderately mentally retarded and are at sheltered workshop level or above. The goal is to provide a true transition program that will lead to competitive placement in the private sector.

The student to staff ratio is kept low at about 6:1 in order to maintain a high commitment to a quality training program for disabled students. The program is led by a coordinator/instructor whose role is not only administrative but instructional in a vocational training setting. Coordinators have BA/BS degrees in a variety of vocational fields. They are assisted by other staff who may also have a BA/BS or, at least, an associate degree or equivalent experience. Community college students support various mentor functions including one-to-one tutorial assistance.

The participants meet the Iowa Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services standards. Students are required to have at least a third grade reading level and one or more significant handicapping conditions that limit employability. Generally, there are also functional deficiencies in personal-social areas which require remediation. Each student must have the potential to be competitively employed at the conclusion of training.

The first step is a two week assessment at a residential vocational evaluation center prior to entry into the program. Vocational counselors develop recommendations based on the student's vocational aspirations. Additional assessment occurs after entry into the program to establish a baseline on each student for the purpose of developing curriculum goals.

One of the evaluation tools that is used is the Vocational Assessment and Curriculum Guide (VACG), which assesses whether students are above sheltered workshop level. Valpar, GATB, the Nonreading Aptitude Test Battery, the Temperament and Values Inventory, the Career Assessment Inventory and the Career Information System of Iowa (a computerized interest test) may also be used. Because all of these assessment tools are used as guides, no placement hinges on a particular test or battery of tests. The focus of the program is to encourage career exploration on an individual basis.

At the completion of the evaluation period, an Individual Program Plan is developed for each student to overcome identified deficiencies as well as to address developmental needs in social, communication and job readiness skills.

The IRP/CBVT is divided into two major components that consist of several hours a day in classes and the rest of the day on job training sites in competitive employment environments. The classroom component is the College-Based Academic Plan. Each student has an academic plan designed to increase his/her basic skills in areas such as math, reading and human relations. There are two types of classes: (1) Specialized classes that teach

functional academics and closely-related job skills. These classes teach using a system of modules carefully selected to meet student needs. There is a focus on acceptable vocational behaviors and work skills. (2) Students can also audit regular classes in areas of interest or for vocational preparation. The college also provides hands-on experiences in some human service areas.

The second component is the Community-Based Training Site. Prior to placing a student, a job or task analysis is performed in order to reach an agreement with the employer regarding the requirements of the job. It is expected that the student will be exposed to as many different areas in the workplace as possible.

Before placement at the training site, students use campus training stations. These involve such things as child care, library services, food services, laundry services and a geriatric program. A task analysis is used in each training situation. Staff train at the worksite and observe the students' progress.

At present, students are placed on about 20 local job sites for training. These include such jobs as day care, hotel/motel worker, nurse aide/orderly, data entry operators, beauticians, small engine repair, manufacturing, food service, mail clerk and janitorial.

The emphasis at the training site is on 96% attendance and a fairly intensive job coaching in close cooperation with the employer. Each student participates in a short weekly conference to discuss progress and areas for improvement. Disparities between employer and student expectations are addressed on an as

needed basis during weekly contacts with the employers. At the end of each semester, the employer is asked to complete an "Evaluation Report" on each student.

Communications are maintained between students, their parents/guardians, and the vocational rehabilitation counselor because parental or guardian involvement is generally a positive factor in the success of the program. As with all other aspects of the program, students are treated as independent functioning adults as much as possible. Advocacy is balanced between the employer's right to know about the student's strengths and weaknesses and the student's need for occupational exploration and training. Stereotyping is avoided when discussing a student's limitations and problem areas with an employer. Employers are given information that is essential to safety and the student's acceptable performance of the job.

The most common problem at the training site centers around the socialization skills of the students. Because many developmentally disabled students take longer to mature, much emphasis is given to problem-solving, personal management, student reaction to constructive criticism and attention to work rules. Most of the problems tend to be non-production related, such as social interaction, peer relationships and personal problem solving. In the classroom component, an emphasis is placed on values, making appropriate decisions, and using a team approach to work.

The job coaching is designed to "fade" as progress is made with each student. After support has faded and students become

successful employees. they are often asked to return to the program and serve as role models to new students by relating their experiences. Certificates and verbal praise are given at times to reinforce progress.

To provide support to students in training or competitive employment, a job club is used. It meets four times a week for six weeks at a time during both daytime and evening hours. It is composed of a group of six to eight students facilitated by vocational rehabilitation counselors. This has been effective in job retention and in developing realistic expectations of the world of work. This program also uses former students as role models to new students.

After the completion of the training program which takes about two years, students are ready for placement into competitive employment. Iowa Valley Employment and Training (JTPA), the U.S. Employment Service Job Service and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation are some of the agencies providing placement. One of the major reasons for program success is the support generated from the business community as well as these established specialized agencies.

Follow-up services are usually limited to two years following placement in competitive employment. Much of the follow-up is done by vocational rehabilitation counselors and through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Those who are not successful are either referred to other services or are referred to their vocational rehabilitation counselor.

Phone calls are the primary mode of contacting both the former student and the employer. Personal visits are usually limited to the first month. Whenever possible, additional contacts are made after 3 months, 6 months and 12 months. In some cases, it has been possible to follow students for two to three years. Students are asked to review successes and expectations. An attempt is made to learn what useful additions could have been made to their training programs.

When there has been a placement failure, the employer's input is sought. A task analysis is done on the areas that have been cited as reasons for failure. It is important for the student to be aware of the reasons for failure in order to learn from the experience.

Failures and training problems do affect community relations on a specific training site although commitment from cooperating employers tends to be very strong. To maintain good community relations, semi-annual recognition functions for participating employers and businesses are held.

## Effectiveness of Program

The program follows the programs evaluation standards established by the Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). Data are collected on each student to be included in the overall program evaluation data base. The criteria for success is student comprehension and retention of the training provided and successful placement.

Approximately 85% of successful placements are in the private sector. The other 15% are in sheltered employment. An 'unsuccessful' determination is considered to be students who drop out for a variety of reasons; those who fall below the 96% attendance rate or those with either medical or emotional problems that may have increased because of the training stresses.

Over the past three years, placement of students completing the program has been 70% which is considerably above the national average of 20% for similar programs. This statistic needs to be interpreted in light of the fact that placement is not the direct responsibility of the community college. Regarding costs, student tuition is currently $750 per semester. The total cost per student in the two-year program approximates $3000.

## For Further Information

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## Abstract

**Iowa Valley Community College District provides a Community-Based Vocational Training program to prepare developmentally disabled adults for placement in competitive employment. The program utilizes a two-phase approach: (1)**

Classroom training in academic subjects, skills related to specific jobs and job retention and job seeking skills and (2) Hands-on training and experience at community-based job sites. The placement rate is several times higher than that of similar programs.

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the
Council for Exceptional Children
(67th, San Francisco, CA, April 3-7, 1989)